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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

In Today's Papers

Gul Visits Baku to Restore Diplomacy in the Caucasus
Media outlets report President Abdullah Gul visited Baku Wednesday and held a joint press conference with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev regarding the tensions in the Caucasus. Gul voiced hope that Azerbaijan and Armenia would manage to resolve the problems in Nagorno Karabakh, "in the spirit of dialogue and mutual understanding." Gul said the Armenians seem ready to withdraw from Nagorno Karabakh. Gul noted that Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia could hold three-party summit talks. He implied the summit could be held on the sidelines of a World Cup soccer qualifying match between the teams of Turkey and Armenia in October next year in Istanbul.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan told NTV and Samanyoglu TV last night that he is planning to hold a three- party meeting with his counterparts from Azerbaijan and Armenia in New York during the UNGA meetings later this month. In addition, Babacan noted "the normalization of ties between Ankara and Yerevan, and also between Yerevan and Baku, is not a dream, but a realistic target." Mainstream Vatan and Islamist-oriented Zaman says that yesterday Babacan had a phone conversation with Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Memmedyarov, and adds that the Memmedyarov gave a positive response to the offer.

Editorial Commentary on Caucasus Crisis

Muharrem Sarikaya wrote in mainstream Sabah: "On the way back from Baku, President Gul said "The instability in the Caucasus is like a giant wall between us. If there is stability, peace and trust in the Caucasus the region will be a key route to Central Asia and China. The Caucasus looks like a small area on the map but it is very effective as a focal point for global issues. I witnessed mutual respect and positive feelings between the Azeri and Armenian leaders. Moreover, Armenians are willing to withdraw from the Azeri land they invaded. A new era is starting. I believe that Russia will approach the Armenia-Azerbaijan issue positively, because Russia doesn't want to be isolated in the region."

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal Radikal: "Turkey should keep very good relationships with Georgia and Azerbaijan. There will be hope for peace, stability and cooperation in the region if the negotiations commence between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the Upper Karabagh issue. All countries in the region, including Turkey, will benefit from such a development. That is why Turkey is also trying to keep a good relationship with Russia."

Ali Sirmen in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "Armenia has made no change in its attitude against Turkey; all it did was to promise the launch of 'unconditional' talks. Some Armenian hardliners don't even favor a diplomatic relationship with Turkey unless Ankara recognizes the 'genocide' claims. They, however, seem to stand close to the 'unconditional talks' formula since it's mainly Armenia that suffers from isolation. We know that the EU and the U.S. are pressuring Ankara to open the border. Opening the border crossing before improvement in the conditions that harm ties between Turkey and Armenia would not bring good results. If Turkey opens the border without conditions, new demands will inevitably follow."

Mustafa Balbay in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "The opening of the border crossing with Armenia will benefit Turkey. However, what would come next? Azerbaijan, for instance, might react to such a development, and ties between Baku and Ankara might be strained. In addition, the U.S. seeks an 'Iran success' in order to cover up its failure in Iraq, and needs Turkey's support. President Ahmadinejad's Istanbul visit was met with mixed reactions. Ahmadinejad said his call on Istanbul contained messages to the Islamic world. Those messages were also meant for the U.S. Turkey tells the U.S. it will not be able to resolve all disputes via

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military force. Turkey tells that isolation will not benefit Iran. It's, however, clear that such words will not mean much when the situation gets a bit tougher."

AKP's Firat Slams Dogan, Opposition Leaders over Deniz Feneri Scandal

All media outlets report the ruling AKP deputy chair Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat held a press briefing Wednesday to respond to the allegations involving his party in the fraud investigation in Germany against the Turkish-owned Islamist-oriented Deniz Feneri ("Light House") charity organization. Firat slammed media tycoon Aydin Dogan and opposition leaders Deniz Baykal (CHP) and Devlet Bahceli (MHP) for "continuing the circulation of lies" over the Deniz Feneri incident. Firat claimed a columnist from Vatan, which is part of the Dogan Media Group, tried to put pressure on the government regarding a file concerning the Islamist broadcaster Kanal 7 TV. Firat also denied all alleged links between the Deniz Feneri organization and the AKP.

CHP Deputy Group Chief Kemal Kilicdaroglu said those responsible for the Deniz Feneri fraud were actually in Turkey, and therefore Turkey should investigate the allegations. "Prime Minister Erdogan sees himself as a dictator, and above the laws in Turkey," said Kilicdaroglu.

Meanwhile, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports the Court of Appeals (Yargitay) chief prosecutor was examining press reports over charges that donations raised by the Islamist-oriented Deniz Feneri charity in Germany had been transferred to Turkey's ruling AKP as well as several Islamist-leaning media outlets. According to Cumhuriyet, if the prosecutor decides the suspicions are serious regarding the involvement of the AKP in the Deniz Feneri scandal, an investigation might be launched and if necessary, information might be asked from German authorities. Article 69 of the Turkish Constitution says "political parties which accept financial assistance from foreign corporate bodies shall be dissolved permanently." Far right Ortadoğu reports, "The AKP could be closed," if the charges in the case implicate the AKP. Opposition DSP Secretary General Masum Turkar told the press yesterday if the AKP had taken money from Deniz Feneri, the case would "end up at the Constitutional Court" for closure.

Cartoons in September 11 Cumhuriyet and Zaman:

PM Erdogan's nose grows into a "Lighthouse" (Deniz Feneri,) says: "I am the best philanthropist!" (Cumhuriyet)

Cartoon commenting on the Turkish press in today's edition of Islamist-oriented Zaman.

Editorial Commentary on AKP-Media Fight over Deniz Feneri Scandal

Semih Idiz commented in mainstream Milliyet: "The EU is concerned about PM Erdogan's harsh reactions to the media and the ongoing corruption cases related to the ruling party. PM Erdogan reiterates at every opportunity that he abides by the EU standards. He should keep this perspective lively and try to improve it. Freedom of the press is among the basic criteria of the EU. Both Erdogan's violation of press freedom and his refusal to investigate corruption charges in his own party create serious concerns in the EU."

Alcohol Consumers Anger PM Erdogan

Mainstreams Milliyet and Vatan drew attention to the messages issued by PM Erdogan after a Ramadan dinner yesterday arranged by the AKP's Kadikoy branch in Istanbul. Erdogan said "some people are complaining about neighborhood pressure against drinking alcohol. On the contrary, only those who do not drink alcohol in this country

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are under pressure. I can tolerate people who consume alcohol but I cannot be forced to share a toast with them." Erdogan was referring to the protests by the residents of Istanbul's Moda neighborhood who began drinking alcohol every night in front of a restaurant operated by the municipality, which stopped serving alcohol last week.

Meanwhile, German green Party co-chair Claudia Roth criticized PM Erdogan's recent reaction to the news about "Deniz Feneri" case and said "This is not the first time PM Erdogan is going beyond the limits. Earlier, he had tried to intimidate the cartoonists for drawing his cartoons. A PM is not God. He is not immune of criticism."

9/11 - 'The U.S. Is Afraid of Turkish Terrorists'

Media outlets pick up on a report from the internet news website World News Daily, in which the FBI Counterterrorism Director told the press a group of young Turks who were trained by Al-Qaeda in Pakistan are planning attacks in the U.S. on the seventh anniversary the September 11, 2001 attacks. Mainstream Hurriyet writes in, "A Turkish Bomb Alarm in the U.S.," that "The U.S. Department of Homeland Security will investigate Turkish citizens with stamps in their passports indicating they entered Pakistan." Mainstream Sabah reports in, "Turkish Al-Qaeda Will Attack the U.S.," that "There are Turkish suspects among the 20,000 suspects U.S. intelligence agencies has flagged."

Editorial Commentary on 9-11

Akif Emre writes in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "In the post 9/11 world, the U.S. is surprised to see the world order being polarized into the U.S. and Russia/China. The U.S. expected economic competition from China, but Russia's assertion back on the world stage was a surprise to the U.S. In 'The War on Terror'- the key thing is it involves Islam. Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslim. Western societies are increasingly paranoid of the Muslim world, which creates a bizarre situation for societies in the West. Since Sept 11th, the War on Terror has terrorized the Muslim World."

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- On Wednesday, UN Special Cyprus Envoy Alexander Downer met President Gul, PM Erdogan and FM Babacan in Ankara before moving on to Cyprus on Thursday to join 'comprehensive' talks between the Cypriot leaders Talat and Christofias.

- 17 Glock handguns were seized Wednesday in a truck entering Turkey through the Habur border crossing, on the border with Iraq.
- Opposition MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli paid a courtesy visit to the new military General Staff chief General İlker Başbuğ on Wednesday.

International News

- Georgia claims Russia will establish military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- The Georgian government says an official report shows 295 people were confirmed dead during the conflict with Russia.
- A Dutch court said the Netherlands was not liable for the deaths in Srebrenica as its troops operated under a UN mandate.

WILSON